Patches

2/12/84

A headline caught my eye last Sunday. "Russian Arts Evolve on the Brink of Dissidence." ... "New Plays Open in Basements, Jazz Echoes in Factory Halls"

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Read 3/1 - 8:00 am

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PATCHES OF GODLIGHT JMB
Genesis 1 selected, John 1:1-14 BSPC
February 12, 1984 Cols, OH

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"Avante-Garde Russian Arts Evolve on the Brink of Dissidence." That headline in last Sunday's Times Arts and Leisure section caught my eye. "New plays open in basements, jazz echoes in factory halls." The article described an ~~low-key~~ art exhibit in the dark basement of a Moscow apartment house. "Many of the paintings were simply hung by string from steam pipes, their titles announced on typewritten scraps of paper glued to the wall." It was the first public exhibition of the works of an artist whose paintings had only been seen secretly before. What made this art so dangerous? Why does the Soviet State have an interest in what people paint, or what people chose to look at? The Times described the works as "bold canvasses, austere sketches, bright graphics." hardly the stuff of subversion. [N.Y. Times, 2/5/54]

Joseph Stalin, ~~quite simply~~ crushed the arts, ~~except those that served the cause of Communism~~. So did the early masters of the Chinese Revolution. ~~People who don't read much, nevertheless recognize the names~~ have Yevtushenko, Solzhevitsyn - all writers whose ~~works~~ earned ~~them~~ the enmity of their government.

At the time of the Spanish Revolution, Hitler threw in on franco's side and practiced the art of saturation bombing. The first target was Guernica, the town in which Pablo Picasso was born. Out of his profound disgust the artist paints Guernica, a brutal + powerful work, banned by the Govern't for its eloquent protest.

~~Pablo Picasso profoundly opposed to the Fascist governmetn~~ of Spain, ~~painted a work,~~ now quite familiar, called Guernica, ~~which was banned in Spain because of its stark~~ and brutal imagery.

What is it about art that is regarded with such respect, such suspicion, such fear? Why do the arts ~~seem to~~ pose a threat to totalitarianism? & which we regard as gentle, non-political, almost non-essential leisure time activity

~~Art is a threat to totalitarianism precisely because it finds a deep meaning~~, a deeper significance to ~~elder~~ ordinary humanity and ~~it~~ points to a source of meaning which transcends ordinary life. Neither Fascism nor Communism can stand that for long. In both instances, the state is ultimate arbiter: there ~~is~~ can be no truth, no reality except

Dictators are threatened by art because art thrives & needs freedom.

new para

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that which the state defines and approves. Because they cannot and do not conform to that, artists - ~~along with serious religious adherents~~ - ~~are customarily strong advocates~~ threaten the very foundation of totalitarianism of any kind. of a ~~freedom~~ which totalitarianism cannot allow.

Interestingly, the other source of subversion, in the eyes of ~~the~~ totalitarians, is free + vigorous expression of religion. Poets, playwrights + prophets - often find themselves in jail together - and sometimes, only there, are we aware of the close relationship between the two.

Presbyterian Theologian Ted Gill writes, "the arts smash open the walls of our imagination and let us look out through the abrupt windows - and breathe in the larger air of an expanded universe." Art + Religion, Gill teaches, are ~~not~~ "up to the same thing".

footnote this in copy! MD

[Sibling Rivalry, a sermon preached at Nassau Presbyterian Church, Princeton, N.J. March 1, 1981]

British author C.S. Lewis pondered the fact that God seemed to keep intruding in his life; the holy kept showing up at unexpected times & places & "Surprised By Joy" he called it once. Another time, reflecting on experiences of unexpected & spontaneous pleasure, he called them "Patches of God light" - a phrase I find wonderfully descriptive.

Have you ever seen one?

Patches of Godlight - ~~little~~ artistic moments when the truth about God and humanity ~~is revealed to us.~~ becomes incandescent. The New Testament is full of them. ~~Jesus was an artist.~~ Ted Gill points to that wonderful moment when a woman

"Patches of Godlight in the woods of our experience." The phrase was penned by C. S. Lewis: it referred to experiences of unexpected and spontaneous pleasure that happen along the way and which become "glimemrings of divine handiwork." ~~Has it ever happened to you?~~ Have your senses ever been assaulted by something so good, so big, so gracious that you found your whole being responding to it? There are moments of wonderful transcendence listening to music for many, moments when humanity in all its depth and God in all his glory seem, for the moment, to be in harmony. There are similar moments, in nature, in relationships with someone whose love is ~~such a~~ an absolute gift of grace, in athletics, in science - where humanity is stretched to its full height and for a moment we are caught up in the glory of God himself. That's what art is - a reflection of the glory of humanity, ~~and that~~ other glory ~~we~~ have come to call God. Those windows in the Narthex, through which we see the humanity of this city, rushing by, shuffling by, jogging by, ambulances, commuters, buses, garbage trucks, street people - and through which we see the images of that other glory, that unexplanable creativity are, indeed, "patches of Godlight."

Use in dedicat

Our texts this morning are two works of art. The first, a wonderful poem which sets out to express the most astounding art of all - the creation of the world. We thought a bit last week about the misunderstanding which results when that poem is forced to serve as ~~scientific data~~ science. We thought about the Exploding Universe idea, the receding galaxies, the electronic hissing the astronomers at Bell Labs hear on the radio telescopes, echoing the first sound at the moment of creation. We ~~tried to see~~ saw how astronomy and theology ~~brings~~ bump into one another at a place ~~astronomers~~ Robert Jastrow calls the "wall of mystery," what Einstein called "a singularity in time" - the moment of creation. You may have read about ~~There was~~ a sad discussion at Mershon two weeks ago between ~~two experts,~~ a Scientific Creationist arguing for the literal accuracy of Genesis and an Evolutionist, the nature of whose argument was not apparent to anyone, according the ~~quite~~ press, ~~courage given the event.~~ It appears that they talked past each other. ~~What a sad event.~~ Genesis I is a breathtaking work of art - not a primer in science. Its point is not the "how" ~~the author does not set out to describe how it happened.~~ Rather, the point is the more important who. put the "who" The scriptural account of the creation is an affirmation that God created, that creation belongs

to God, reveals God's purposes, that humankind is created in God's image, belongs to God, is accountable to God, is created to live in relationship with God. And that, I would submit, is singularly more ~~essential than the vacuous~~ fuss about how long it took. In fact, ~~the argument which seems to be fascinating to so many~~ not only misses the point, but diverts attention from the meaning and intent of the text. Genesis contains truth, conveyed artistically, magnificently. To treat it like a scientific description is like ~~confirming~~ your appreciation of a Renoir to the chemical composition of the point he used.

To learn a thing means more than to think about it. There is an old scholastic maxim that goes, "nothing is present in the intellect, that is not previously present in the senses," a lesson we all learn when trying to describe the taste of a sauce, the sound of a symphony, or a touch of love. and so, to convey the most profound, art is the medium.

Centuries after the creation stories were written, another man took up the task, this time to convey. Something of the prefundity he had experienced in Jesus of Nazareth. He used the format: "In the beginning was

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the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In the beginning was the creative energy of God straining to be expressed. In the beginning is God whose nature it is to be making things, saying things, showing things about himself. "In the beginning was the Word" - and then - the most astonishing claim anybody ever made; "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." The scholars think that this passage was probably is a hymn; that it was written to be sung, affirmed artistically.

Religion needs art because the deepest, most profound feelings, sigh cannot be reduced to words. Faith, hope, aspiration need music & color & form - to be expressed

Calvin
Pavlova
Theology-like Poetry -
w/ a longing Heart -

The relationship has not been an intimate one in recent centuries. Time was when most art was about religious topics, paid for by the church and displayed, played, read in connection with religious institutions. But just as science and theology parted company for a time, so religion and art were divorced at the Reformation, particularly for those of us who inhabit the Reformed/Presbyterian wing of the Reformation. In our more radical moments we destroyed the sculpture and carvings in the cathedrals, white-washed the walls and burned the icons. In our ardent suspicion of the arts, we banished the organ and the candles and even the cross as potentially idolatrous and, as one theologian put it, turned the flesh of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the one dimensional brittleness of the spoken word.

Just as we are burying the hatchet with our brothers and sisters in science, however, so there is a new spirit of accomodation between religion and art today. It is exciting and interesting. The church, for instance, invited the artists of the East Side to use our facility to display...After they recovered from initial incredulity, they responded enthusiastically. Not surprisingly, many had a lot to say about topics familiar to us; God, love, beauty, justice, grace. They are our allies. "We are up to the same things"... All art is religious in the sense that it opens up a window

All art is religious in the sense that it pushes into and beyond the ordinary. We are works of God's art, expressions of God's creative energy. That image of God in each of us is his creativity. We are the animals, someone noted, who stopped, picked up a burnt stick and drew a picture of a bison on a cave wall. Art is in us. We are defind, perhaps most truthfully, as cocreators with God, co-artists, working on the same canvass, responsible for building, shaping, forming, creating the future of the world. That is our highest and holiest vocation...to co-create, with God, the world we will give to those who come after: to paint and sculpt and shape and build ~~the world of the future~~.

In a recently published scholarly commentary on Genesis, the author writes that the relationship of creator to creation has always been the issue and still is. The academic formulation may bore you to tears: its personal expression ~~is~~ the most urgent questions you will ever ask: "O God, why me? Is there anybody there? When I die, will anyone care ~~ultimately~~? Where did I come from? Where am I going? ~~Does it matter~~? Is anyone listening? Do I matter to anyone? ~~Why does life have to be so cruel~~?"

(11)

God's

The ~~matter~~ of the ~~creator's~~ relationship to the creation - is the crux of the matter for every man and every women. Our oldest truth is that the creation is God's. Our most important truth is that the creator God loves the creation, has become part of it, in J.C. has acted in a way to make it whole, to give it peace, and love, and hope. We are invited to trust that God of creation: when the limits of intellect become all too real, to see the patches of Godlight we are given. AMEN.

and when we can't understand, when the limits of intellect becom all too real, when ~~the~~ we feel drawn into a cynism which seems like ~~simple~~ Mtgnty - we are invited to look around a bit, and ~~to~~ see th Patches of Godlight we are given.

stop, & listen, & feel &

Ama

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED

GOD SEPARATED LIGHT FROM DARKNESS

AND THERE WAS MORNING

AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

The relationship of the creator to the creation is the issue, theologically. We kept returning to it as we reflected on the meaning and significance of the new space we built - with its natural light, and earth tones, and sunshine, and plants. The creation is subject of countless works of art - the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the great window at Yorkminster.

Millie Greaves has given us a contemporary interpretation of the truth of the ancient words of Genesis. She is here today - please great her afterward.

As we dedicate the windows we are reminded of the great texts which inspired them.

It is God's creation, in its movement from chaos to order, its purity and color and beauty, its sensual lushness - it is God's and it is good.

It is God's good creation we see in those windows - and also through them. They will always remind us of the connection between religion and life, Bible stories and human stories, as we look at the shapes and forms in the glass and the shapes and forms and people of Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio - through them.

As we dedicate the windows to the glory of God we are also reminded of those who have gone before us - in whose memory these windows are given to Broad Street Presbyterian Church:

The Halliday Family
The Harry M. Reynolds Family
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Howard Copeland Jr.
The James F. Merkel Family
Marcella R. and Richard V. Willcox

And now in their memory and to God's glory will you join in dedicating these windows. Let us pray together the prayer of dedication.

John M. Buchanan
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
February 12, 1984